Higher Me : How Being Diagnosed Bipolar Impacted My Career

Mark Rouse · 5 min read · Draft

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In 2013, I took a trip to Chicago for St. Patrick's Day weekend. I was a senior at The University of Cincinnati studying Marketing and International Business.

I had just finished working for Delta Air Lines, which I mainly did to have free flights throughout college.

I traveled manically during those three years, visiting over 50 cities, 7 countries, and 4 continents.

But that work experience along with my 3.8 GPA still hadn't earned me any job offers to date. At least until that trip.

At one point, I was at a bar with a group of friends, one of them being Sean Hooey. Hooey played football for UC, and is basically seven feet tall.

Hooey and I were walking up to the bar, and he and a stranger bumped into each other. This nice stranger immediately apologized, and made a joke about how he didn't want any trouble.

Then this stranger introduces himself as Matt Considine and offers to buy us a drink. We start talking with him, but eventually Hooey goes back with our other friends so it’s just me and Matt.

I end up asking Matt what he does for a living, and he tells me he is a Sales Manager for Groupon Getaways.

I had always been a big fan of Groupon, both as a company and as a customer.

I remembered Andrew Mason, their founder, being featured on the front page of Forbes calling Groupon the Next Web Phenom.

I had eaten at countless restaurants on Groupon before, and even used it for more intense things like skydiving and Lasik surgery.

So then I asked him “What do you do all day?”

His response was something like “I manage a team of salespeople who partner with different hotels across the country and get them to promote room nights on Groupon.”

My next question was “So how does that work for the hotels? What does working with Groupon entail?”

He responds “Think about it. If you are a hotel and have 100 rooms available every night, and are only on average filling 80 of them, that’s 20 room nights that go unsold every night. We work with hotels to sell those incremental room nights on a revenue share.”

I asked “How much does it cost the hotels?”

Matt said “They don’t pay anything up-front. That’s the beauty. We just operate on a revenue share of the Groupons sold, so if a room night was purchased for $100, the hotel gets $70 and Groupon gets $30. It’s really that simple.”

It made total sense to me. Hotels have

mainly fixed costs, and if the alternative is not selling anything additional, I saw the value in partnering with Groupon Getaways to generate incremental revenue.

I knew this was my ticket. I have always been told I am a people person, and can get along with almost anybody.

I loved to travel, and I am the type of guy who WOULD convert a drink at a bar with a stranger into a job offer.

And that's exactly what happened. I got Matt’s contact information, send over my resume, interviewed as a formality, and was working for Groupon by June of 2013.

I spent my first six months in training, where I closed over 150 normal style Groupons- the ones for salons, spas, restaurants, fitness, activities, etc. Here, the revenue shares were almost always 50/50, which I found to be excessive.

I just felt it was above my paygrade to call out executives in my first year of my professional career, so I kept my feelings about it to myself.

I led my hiring class in overall revenue, and was eventually promoted to Team Lead for Groupon Getaways.

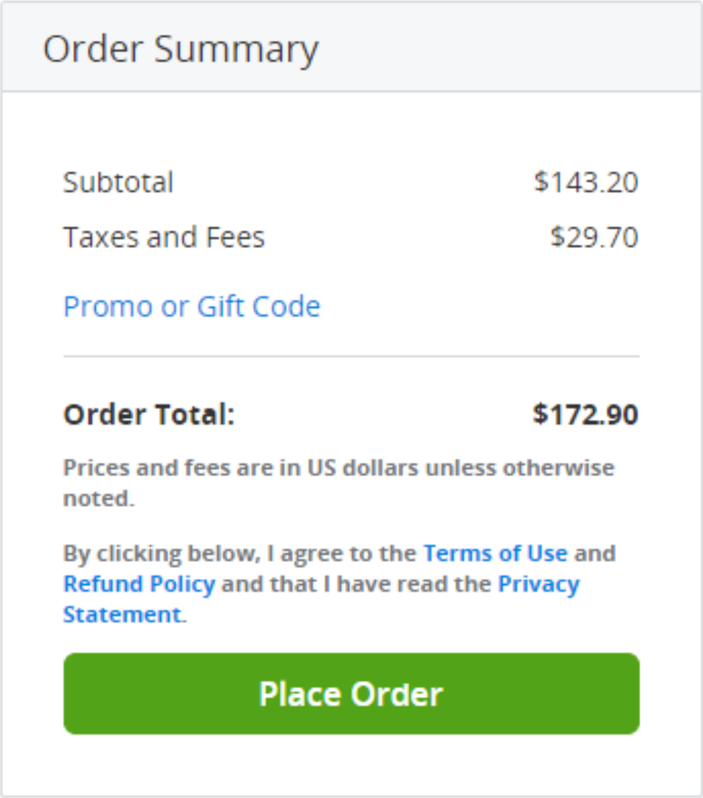
After being at Groupon for only two years, my annual book of business brought Groupon over $1.5 million dollars in profit.

That was comprised of over 225 deals for over 100 hotels across the country.

I was scheduled to make at least $100,000 from my existing business, which was way more than I had ever dreamed of making at age 25.

There was just one main issue. Either I was suffering a manic episode because of an undiagnosed bipolar disorder, or I became witness to large-scale fraud from within the company I worked for.

I’ll explain. When you to go www.groupon.com/getaways and reserve a hotel room, you are presented with this screen:



Order Summary

Subtotal	$143.20
Taxes and Fees	$29.70

Promo or Gift Code

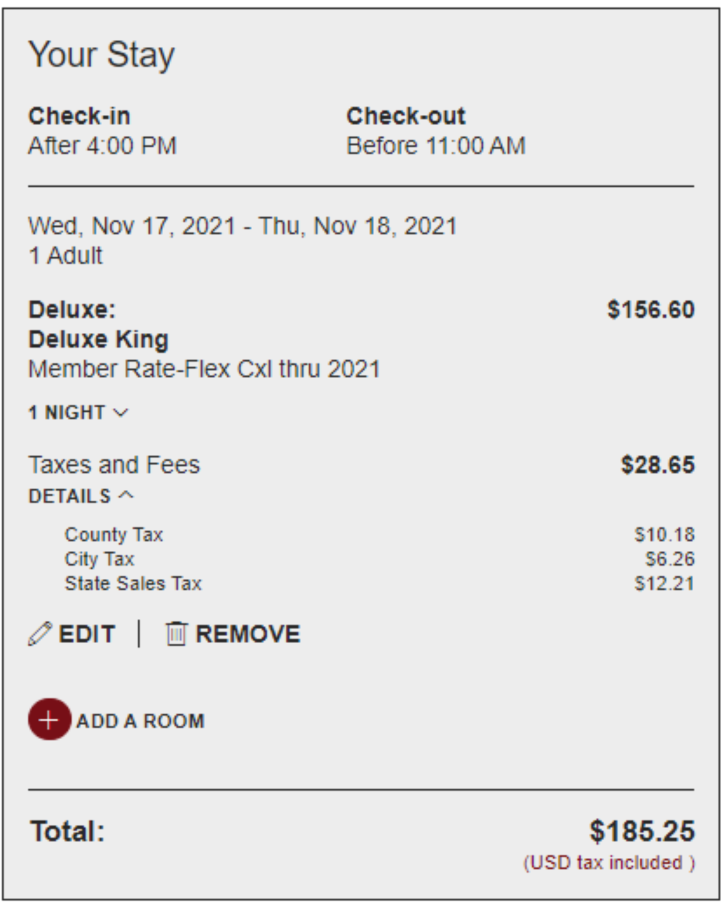
Order Total:	**$172.90**

Prices and fees are in US dollars unless otherwise noted.

By clicking below, I agree to the Terms of Use and Refund Policy and that I have read the Privacy Statement.

In the "Taxes and Fees" line item, Groupon decided to start charging their customers a hidden booking fee. It was just an additional arbitrary percentage that we added onto the sale price.

Compare those numbers to how it gets itemized directly from that hotel for the same reservation:



Your Stay

Check-in
After 4:00 PM

Check-out
Before 11:00 AM

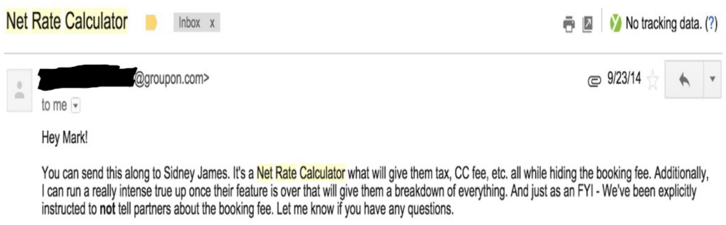
Wed, Nov 17, 2021 - Thu, Nov 18, 2021
1 Adult

Deluxe: **Deluxe King** Member Rate-Flex Cxl thru 2021	**$156.60**
1 NIGHT	
Taxes and Fees	**$28.65**
DETAILS	
County Tax	$10.18
City Tax	$6.26
State Sales Tax	$12.21
Total:	**$185.25** (USD tax included)

This can be confirmed with a simple cross-multiplication comparison. With a room rate of $143.20, the total after taxes would be $170.05 if there wasn't a hidden $2.85 booking fee.

Groupon started secretly implementing this booking fee at some point in 2014, but unfortunately, since our executives never even told the salespeople it was happening, I had to discover it from a hotel partner who found the discrepancy.

When I went to management about the booking fee, they did admit they were doing it, and eventually sent me this email:



Net Rate Calculator

[redacted]@groupon.com>
to me

9/23/14

Hey Mark!

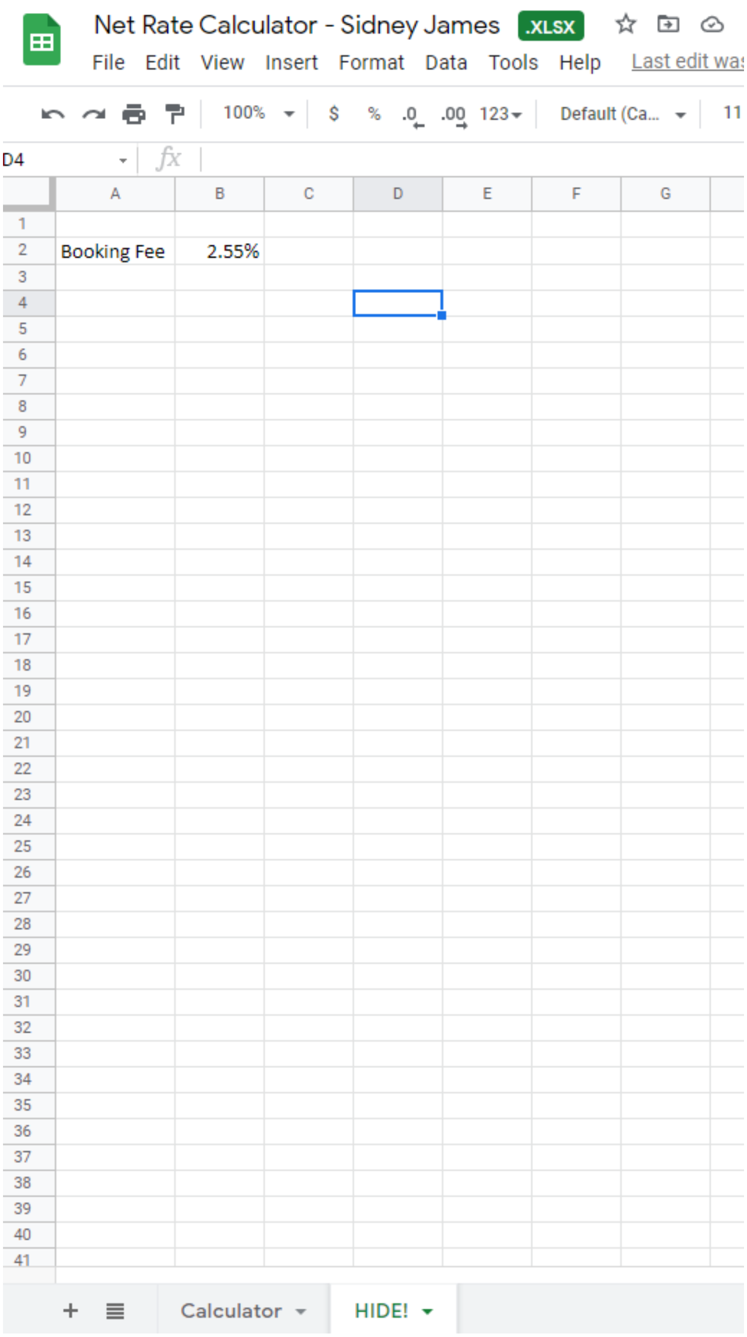
You can send this along to Sidney James. It's a Net Rate Calculator what will give them tax, CC fee, etc. all while hiding the booking fee. Additionally, I can run a really intense true up once their feature is over that will give them a breakdown of everything. And just as an FYI - We've been explicitly instructed to **not** tell partners about the booking fee. Let me know if you have any questions.

Groupon's solution was to create an intentionally misleading excel sheet that included a hidden tab with the booking fee.

Finding the hidden tab wasn't as easy as you would think, though. In fact, when I originally tried to extract it, I couldn't. But then I sent the excel sheet to a trusted friend, who happens to work for an accounting firm associated with Groupon, who is also an excel wizard.

He was able to extract a hidden tab labeled "HIDE!" that's only purpose was to factor the booking fee into the equations.

Here is a screenshot as proof:



	A	B
2	Booking Fee	2.55%

See MOV in Wayback Listing to view video.

0:00 / 0:31

1x

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